

April 6, 1963

Approved For Release 2004/01/16 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000500050022-1

The Adult Congressman

by Murray Kempton

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 X Pers 2 Eugene McCARTHY
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 Murray KEMPTON

The long legs of George Lodge, who had been the last stepping stone to Teddy Kennedy's ascension to the Senate, were found stretched and relaxed the other day in the office of Congressman John Lindsay of New York City.

A visitor observed that the Massachusetts Senatorial election had been almost too pat an exercise in the inverse operations of the merit system in American politics. Professor Stuart Hughes, the independent and the freshest candidate, had gotten the fewest votes; George Lodge, the Republican and the best-trained candidate, had gotten the next fewest; and Teddy Kennedy, who had never taken any greater trouble than to be born, had gotten most of all.

"You know," said George Lodge, "I was sorry about Hughes. He started so well, talking about disarmament and disengagement. I thought he promised a different kind of campaign. Then—I don't know, maybe he thought he had a chance to win—he ended up sounding almost as bad as Kennedy and I did."

One leaves such men with a pang. We do not seem merely to have gained an appallingly junior Senator from Massachusetts; we very well may also have lost an adult Congressman.

Still there are more adult Congressmen than either the exterior reputation or the interior mood of their institution might condition any visitor to expect. The adult Congressman can be hopeful or disenchanted. It is useless to assay him as liberal or conservative, since these words are usable with Congressmen for describing public attitudes rather than private feelings. He can be an insider or an outsider. He can believe, as Senator Clark of Pennsylvania does, that President Kennedy has a brilliant record in office or he can wonder, as Senator McCarthy of Minnesota sometimes does, whether the Administration is not so busy taking soundings that it forgets to sail the ship.

But there is one certain test for identifying the adult Congressman whatever his party. He qualifies if, during the first half hour of any visit with him, he brings up the one text whose citation defines him. Its source, oddly enough, is Dwight D. Eisenhower, whose final words as President were a warning against the military-industrial complex the growth of which, he said, has come "to involve the very structure of our society."

Mr. Eisenhower's farewell address has a peculiar history. The liberals, who have the franchise on respectable discontent, had in the main ceased to listen to

Mr. Eisenhower and barely noticed it. The Republicans quite forgot to enter it into the Congressional Record; it was finally introduced by Eugene McCarthy, a liberal Democrat. It has survived since as an underground cult work—Mr. Eisenhower would be surprised that he has been preserved as Henry Miller was—and it exists now as the ark of the doctrine which separates the adult Congressman from his fellows.

The successful Congressman, now as always, has been the one who thinks of his seat as a counsel bench for just one client, his district.

"They work their way," says Richard Bolling of Missouri, a critical adult insider, "on to those committees where they can get favors for their districts and after that they can't be beaten and they establish themselves in little enclaves of subcommittees where they are more powerful than the President."

It is this passion which John Lindsay, a Republican and an adult, parodies when he mockingly explains why he votes against bills to outlaw pornography literature.

"Pornography is the largest industry in the Seventeenth Congressional District," Lindsay says. "Do they want to make it a depressed area?"

The \$50 billion defense budget has grown without effective resistance because it fattens on the demands of Congressmen for their districts and because it diverts private corporations from their pride in their independence and from that concern with fiscal stability, which overcomes them when they confront a child on a relief roll.

"I was complaining to a friend of mine who is in the Defense Department about the industrial-military complex the other day," Lindsay says. "He said he had heard a lot of vague talk about this sort of thing, but he just wished someone would come up with one concrete example. I told him I could give him two."

"Last year the Justice Department brought in a bill which would have given it the power to fire any employee of a defense contractor whom it judged a security risk. The Pentagon, of course, testified for it. And then every Congressman got a letter from the largest association of defense contractors urging him to vote for the Industrial Security Bill. And this would have been the first law ever written in the United States which would have given the government the power to fire people in private industry."

"Then we were debating the raise in the debt limit